

**Donald S. Williams**  
**1705 Dock St. – Apt. 306**  
**Tacoma, Washington 98402-3220**  
**Telephone: (253) 779-4666**  
**E-mail: [dsw1222@earthlink.net](mailto:dsw1222@earthlink.net)**

January 2, 2007

**FAXed to: (253) 534-4679 on January 2, 2007**

**SUBJECT: Comments Relating To Tacoma Narrows Bridge Tolls**

**REFERENCE: Preproposal Statement of Inquiry (CR-101) Published In Washington State Register 06-24-119 on December 20, 2006**

**TO: Members of Tacoma Narrows Bridge Citizen Advisory Committee**

c/o Mr. R. David Pope, Toll Systems Manager  
Washington State Department of Transportation, Olympic Region  
Tacoma Narrows Bridge Project  
3214 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street Court NW, Suite 302  
Gig Harbor, WA 98335-8583

Please enter these comments into the official record of the toll-setting activities currently underway with the Tacoma Narrows Bridge Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) and the Washington State Transportation Commission.

I am unable to attend the CAC meetings on January 2 and 6, 2007. Accordingly, I am submitting these comments and recommendations for the record.

**Comment No. 1: Tolls should not be collected unless WSDOT is able to provide three traffic lanes during the peak AM and peak PM travel hours.**

Early-on (dating back to before the November, 1998 Advisory Election), WSDOT promised that the collection of tolls would not begin until the department could provide three traffic lanes during the peak travel direction during the peak travel hours. This has always been the policy of WSDOT and a commitment WSDOT and its (then) private partner, United Infrastructure of Washington, Inc., used to sell the project to the voters. Tolling was to begin as soon as the new bridge was opened, even though the old bridge would still be undergoing extensive renovations for many months, as long as the three peak-direction lanes could be provided. This commitment meant that three traffic lanes would be made available in the eastbound direction during the AM peak hours and three traffic lanes would be available in the westbound direction during the PM peak hours. It has generally been understood that a reversible lane or the use of a movable barrier would be required. Regardless of how WSDOT was to achieve this goal, the promise of three peak-direction lanes on the first day of tolling is a long-standing WSDOT commitment.

In recognition of this promise and commitment by WSDOT, the CAC should include in its recommendations to the Transportation Commission the following:

1. Include a reminder that this promise and commitment was made as a condition of the startup of toll collections.
2. If for any reason WSDOT is unable to provide the three peak-direction lanes on any given day for any reason (e.g., construction delays or lane blockages during its renovation of the old bridge), the toll-collection equipment should be turned off for that day and no tolls should be charged until such time as the three peak-direction lanes are re-established.

**Comment No. 2: Vehicles that use the manual toll booths should be tolled at a rate not to exceed \$3.00 on opening day and for some period of time thereafter.**

WSDOT has always promised that tolls would be set initially at \$3.00 for all vehicles regardless of vehicle classification (i.e., regardless of the number of axles). This promise was made well before the November, 1998 Advisory Election and, in fact, it was clearly stated in the Project Description that appeared on the 1998 ballot immediately below the Ballot Title statement. Additionally, the concept of the fixed-rate toll on opening day is contained in financial analysis of the original “Base Case” which was presented in various documents including documents presented to the Transportation Commission in September, 2005.<sup>1</sup> Under the 2005 Base Case, the new bridge was to open on April 1, 2007 with a flat \$3.00 toll for all vehicle classes in 2007; i.e., the flat toll was to remain in effect for a period of nine months (April 1 through December 31, 2007).

CAC members should note that this original 2005 Base Case differs from the “Base Case” that WSDOT is currently using in that the flat rate for the 2005 Base Case was maintained for nine months, compared to the current “Base Case” in which the flat rate is maintained for only six months.

CAC members also should note that all of the toll discount scenarios currently under discussion include per-axle tolls beginning on opening day.<sup>2</sup> These proposals violate what the voters approved in the 1998 Advisory Election and, additionally, are counter to WSDOT’s long-standing promise of a flat-rate toll on opening day and for some period thereafter. Regardless of the six months vs. nine months, WSDOT long-standing promise that tolls will not exceed \$3.00 for all vehicles for some period of time should not be ignored.

---

<sup>1</sup> Report addressed to WSDOT’s David Pope from Wilbur Smith Associates, “RE: Tacoma Narrows Bridge Traffic and Revenue Study Update – Base Case.” Dated September 16, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Toll scenarios presented to the CAC at its October 13, 2006 meeting (i.e., Scenarios Nos. 1 – 6) and toll scenarios presented to the CAC at its December 12, 2006 meeting (i.e., Scenarios 3, 5A and 6) all violate WSDOT’s promise of a flat-rate toll on opening day.

In recognition of this promise by WSDOT, and to avoid a violation of what the voters approved in the November, 1998 Advisory Election, the CAC should include in its recommendations to the Transportation Commission the following:

1. Toll discounts should be offered for electronic toll collection (ETC) in order to encourage the use of the *Good To Go!* transponders. Please refer to my Comments No. 3, below, regarding ETC discounts.
2. For at least the first six months of toll operations, a flat-rate toll of \$3.00 per vehicle should be charged in the manual toll collection lanes. After the initial six month period, tolls that vary depending on the number of vehicle axles may be introduced.

**Comment No. 3: The only toll discount offered should be for drivers using the ETC transponders. These ETC toll discounts should be as large as possible in order to encourage the use of the electronic toll express lanes.**

It is a well known fact that there will be major congestion at the toll plaza unless a high percentage, approximately 60%, of the toll payers use the electronic toll express lanes. In a recent *Good To Go!* newsletter, WSDOT said that it needs at least 25,000 drivers using ETC transponders on opening day in order to avoid congestion problems related to the now-well-known “tollbooth weave”. So far, 10,750 people have signed up to be notified.<sup>3</sup> But “signing up to be notified” is not the same as being “sold”, so it’s very important that the CAC recommend a toll structure that encourages the use of *Good To Go!* accounts and thus promotes and increases electronic tolling. Therefore, it is important that discounts be offered to users of ETC transponders. More people will opt for ETC transponders if the toll discount is substantial.

Offering a single toll discount for ETC transponder users also simplifies the work of the toll operators as they have only one toll structure to manage. It also makes the tolling system fair as there will be no complaints that one group is being favored over another group.

My recommendation regarding toll discounts are as follows:

1. The only toll discounts that should be offered are for the use of ETC transponders.
2. It will be necessary to offer a large discount for the first year in order to guarantee reaching WSDOT’s objective of 25,000 ETC transponder users on opening day.
3. After reviewing the various toll scenarios presented to the CAC, the discount should be at least 50% of the manual toll booth rate. If it is financially feasible, and especially if the state’s buy-down contribution of \$10 million is realized, then the toll discount should be increased to encourage more ETC users.

---

<sup>3</sup> The number 10,750 is from a December 27, 2006 article in The News Tribune, “Drivers Could Get Bridge Toll Break”, citing a quotation by WSDOT employee Janet Matkin.

4. Because of the uncertainty of the state buy-down contribution, the CAC must consider toll discount options both with and without the state's contribution. There should be one toll recommendation assuming no state contribution and one recommendation assuming the full \$10 million state contribution for the first year of tolling. The CAC should assume from the outset that the 2007 Legislature will follow Governor Gregoire's recommendation and appropriate the full \$10 million. Submitting a range of toll discount recommendations that vary depending on how much money the Legislature appropriates will most likely result in less than the full \$10 million, or maybe no money, being appropriated. The CAC's recommendation should assume that the full \$10 million is appropriated.

Thank you for the opportunity to present these comments and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Donald S. Williams

L07001